Editorial
Conflict of interest raises other issues

The elevation of Andrew M. Eisenmann to a job as part-time staff assistant in the Office of the Dean for Student Affairs in addition to his role as director of the Student Art Association is a severe conflict of interest and bodes ill for the future of student control of student activities. Eisenmann and the current Dean for Student Affairs Stephen Immerman both say Eisenmann is de facto leader of the Student Art Association. He determines policy for the group and strongly influences the group's role in the Association of Student Activities.

Recent decisions of that body have frequently run counter to the desires of the Dean's Office, and it has also implied its need to block them. For Eisenmann to exercise authority within a recognized student activity, hence in the Association of Student Activities, clearly violates the MIT Corporation's historic commitment to the independence of student organizations.

Eisenmann's promotion highlights several crucial issues facing MIT student government and activities:

- The status of organizations as "student activities." The Association of Student Activities, charged with recognizing and recognizing MIT student activities, seems to do little more than wield a rubber stamp.

- The shortcomings of the Association of Student Activities. Its function should include assigning office space and advocating the interests of its member organizations. Why has the Association of Student Activities been unable to perform its duties?

- The role of the Dean's Office in student activities. The Dean's Office claims to be supporting them, but that support is recognized by including blocking redistribution of office space, requiring student activity leaders to attend countless meetings, and generally imposing more control over student organizations. Is this the appropriate role of the Dean's Office in student activities?

- The absence of centralized student leadership. Undergraduate Association president is ostensibly the elected voice of the student body. No recent president has been able to build a consensus, let alone effect change, on any of the issues central to student control and independence. The current president, Michael Wirt, has failed even to address these issues. Can the Undergraduate Association president effectively lead student activities?

- Lack of input from the student body. Most student organizations, from living groups to Undergraduate Association committees, have no or limited input into their constituent groups. These groups control significant resources, financial and otherwise. How can students exercise control over their money and determine how resources are used and used?

Student leaders and members of the faculty and administration have spent much time in recent years discussing these problems, but have acted decisively on none. Student activities are an ineffective check on the power of their administrator should be separate from that of the Institute. The Dean's Office should have little to do with the affairs of student groups, yet its influence grows. Unless students and leaders of the student body have spent much time in recognizing, evaluating, and controlling the activities of their own constituents, and their constituent groups, it is neither their role nor their responsibility to be the voice of the student body. No recent president has been able to build a consensus, let alone effect change, on any of the issues central to student control and independence. The current president, Michael Wirt, has failed even to address these issues. Can the Undergraduate Association president effectively lead student activities?

- The lack of a clear definition of "student activities." The MIT organization is called the Student Art Association. The Tech staff and represent the opinion of the writer. The Tech reserves the right to edit or condense all letters.